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LIFE AND CONFESSIONS
OF
JAMES GILBERT JENKINS:
THE
MURDERER OF EIGHTEEN MEN.

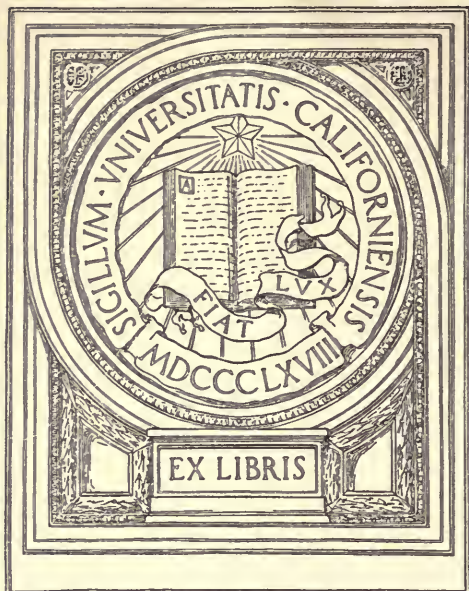


PHONOGRAPHICALLY REPORTED AND ARRANGED FOR THE PRESS BY
R. E. WOOD.

PUBLISHED BY
C. H. ALLEN AND R. E. WOOD.
NAPA CITY.

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No. 417 Clay Street, San Francisco.
1864.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



ROBERT ERNEST COWAN



JAMES GILBERT JENKINS.

LIFE AND CONFESSIONS
OF
JAMES GILBERT JENKINS:

THE
MURDERER OF EIGHTEEN MEN.

Containing an account of the murder of eight white men and ten Indians; together with the particulars of highway robberies, the stealing of several horses, and numerous other crimes, committed in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, Texas, New Mexico, Nebraska and California: as narrated by himself to COL. C. H. ALLEN, Sheriff of Napa County, while in jail under sentence of death for the murder of PATRICK O'BRIEN.

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Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and sixty-four,

By R. E. WOOD,

In the Clerk's office of the United States District Court for the Northern District of California.

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PREFATORY.

It has been said that "we are creatures of circumstance;" that we are tossed about here and there upon the great sea of life without rudder or chart, and finally driven into such port to which the ever changing wind of circumstance may waft us. It would seem that in some cases such is the result of human life. Whether this be so or not, it certainly is the fact that circumstances influence us to a greater or less degree, for good or for evil, and it becomes every well wisher of the human race—every one who would wish to see crime decrease—to endeavor to draw around himself or herself, or others, (especially the young), such circumstances as shall cause them, or at least influence them, to act in accordance with that divinely bestowed Monitor that acts with unmistakable power in every human breast. There is more or less crime being enacted every day; and these golden shores have been stained with the blood of hundreds of human beings, that need not have fallen victims to the assassin's hand, had the proper circumstances been thrown around the perpetrators of these bloody deeds while yet their plastic minds were being molded by that inconceivable power—*education*! The principal object of this little work is not to pander to the

taste for tragedy, but to cause the people to see and more fully realize the effects and ends of the many enticing vices that on every hand are alluring the youth of this coast on in paths of crime.

The following pages tell the history of a child of circumstance. The parents of James Gilbert Jenkins, according to himself and others whom I have conversed with who knew them, were good, honest, upright people; his sister and brothers were the same; and up to the time when he fell a victim to the accursed influence of that gambler, thief, robber, murderer, John Forbes, and his associates, there was nothing that marked him from the commonality of his fellows, unless it be that his mind was a little more active, and his physical system better developed. For all any one at that time could have seen, he gave promise of being a good and intelligent man. But these blighting circumstances were thrown about him; they drew him from the school he loved so well, and trained his naturally powerful mind in ignorance of everything except the criminal arts: and when he arrived at mature manhood, saw the position he occupied, and realized the fact that his life thus far had been one of error and wrong, prompted by the natural goodness of his nature, he resolved and vowed to lead a better life. But again a powerful influence is thrown around him; circumstances that his nature, already familiar with crime, could not withstand, and the last great error of his life is worked out. Society, to protect itself, dooms this unfortunate man to death; and while he stands on the

very brink of eternity, just ready to step into the unknown future, he takes a retrospective view of his past life, and with the mind's clear eye sees the causes that have led him to the place where he now stands. With an aching heart and an earnestness known only to one in his position, he tells his simple story, and warns others from a similar career, asking that parents and guardians shall look well to the influences and circumstances that may surround the children under their care. He said that since being under sentence he had become a different man, and his only wish was that he might be the cause of doing some little good, and thus partly atone for the wrongs he had done. He thought that perhaps his story and warnings might be the means of saving more persons from a criminal's life than he had caused to suffer by his crimes, and thus his life might still not be all a blank. He felt what he said, and the warm tears quite frequently coursed down his cheeks as seals to the earnestness and truthfulness of what he said. He looked over his past life with sorrow and regret. One Sunday morning I was reading his account of his early life—in the presence of Col. Allen—to him, and when I reached that point in the story when he left home and school—the turning point of his whole career—he pulled his hat down over his face, (in manly pride) to hide the hot tears that flowed thick and fast as he thought of those young and innocent days. He sat there a minute or two trying to check his feelings, but he was unable to do so, and soon went into his cell and gave them full vent in sobs

and moaning for nearly half an hour, when the Colonel went in and persuaded him to come out. With great earnestness he warned the boys against drinking spirituous liquors, and said he never committed a crime, or never could commit one, unless under the influence of alcoholic spirits; and it was that bottle of whiskey that caused him to kill O'Brien at that time, and in so reckless a manner as he did.

We claim no literary merit whatever in this work. It is given to the public pretty much as it was taken from the lips of this unlettered man, in phonographic notes, and we only hope it may accomplish the object he desired. Kind words from the lips of so hardened a criminal as he was, should be treasured, remembered and followed. The boys, especially of this coast, will do well to heed his warning, and have nothing to do with horse-racing, gambling, whiskey drinking, or keeping bad company, for these will, as he said,—and every man of sound sense will sanction it—lead to crime, and it may be to the gallows.

R. E. WOOD.

Napa City, March 1st, 1864.

LIFE AND CONFESSIONS

OF

JAMES GILBERT JENKINS.

EARLY LIFE.

I was born in Green county, North Carolina, on the 11th of August, 1834. My father's name was John Jenkins, and my mother's Sally Jenkins; her maiden name was Underwood. In the early spring of 1836, when I was about one and a half years old, my parents emigrated to Tennessee, where we lived about a year and a half more, and then emigrated to Livingston county, Missouri, during the summer of 1837. I was but three years old, but I can remember how the cars looked, and how they scared me, and how I ran from them; and I can recollect that on the way we went to see a menagerie of wild animals, and I remember the lions, tigers, and other animals; I also recollect that we went to a river that was difficult to cross, and some people were swimming their cattle across, and a man was there with a canoe; a white cow went down stream, and this man went after her with his canoe, and got her out on shore again. These little incidents serve to show that my memory is quite good. When at our journey's end, father rented a place from a man by the name of Livingston, that the county was named after. We lived there during that winter, and the next spring father put in a crop of corn, wheat, and oats. Father was an honest, hard-working man, and mother was a good woman. We lived in the simple style of the

country in those early days, with nothing of particular note taking place to vary the general routine of our lives. I remember when the corn was gathered in the fall, I used to ride on the loads up to the barn, and, in passing under a large timber that was placed across the top of the tall gate posts, I was knocked off twice, by letting my head come in contact with this beam.

In the early part of the winter, father went to Gentry county to build a couple of chimneys (he was a mason by trade), leaving his family at home. While he was there, he took up a piece of government land and built a house on it. Just about Christmas, father returned home; the snow at that time being about two feet deep. It was not common for father to be away from home, and his coming was looked for with much anxiety by the whole family. When he returned home, a little incident happened that I well remember. We had all gone to bed, and all were sleeping, except mother; the night was cold and still; she heard him whistling a long way off, and called to us children, and told us he was coming. It was ten o'clock at night, but we jumped out of bed and went waddling through the snow, which was up to our knees, to meet him; (when I say *we*, I mean my sister, who was next younger than me, and a brother, still younger than her); we went without other clothes than our night clothes, just as we got out of bed, and were nearly frozen, but father picked us all three up in his arms, and packed us into the house. We sat up about two hours, talking with father about the country where he had been, and then went to bed about midnight, feeling glad and happy that father had come home.

We lived there until spring, with nothing of particular note taking place, and then went into Gentry county to the land father had bought and the house he had built. He broke up some land and put in a crop that spring. The country was new and but few people lived there, neighbors being five or six miles apart, consequently we had no school, and I had no chance to learn anything with the exception that sometimes of

nights mother would hear us spell, having us all that were large enough sit down while she taught us. The summer passed away, and in the fall, father went away to be gone three months, to work at his trade, and mother lived alone with the children, while he was gone—the family now consisting of myself, my sister Nancy, and two brothers, Albert and George. Towards spring, father came home, and everything went on happy and pleasant, without anything of note taking place. I used to go and help the neighbors plant corn, by dropping it for them, for two or three bits a day. Thus time went on until the summer that I was nine years old. By this time, the country had become settled enough so that there were children enough to make up a school; a teacher was hired, and we had a school of twenty-five scholars.

MY FIRST AND ONLY TERM AT SCHOOL.

The teacher's name was Linville, and they paid him three dollars a month for each scholar. Well, the school opened, and our parents sent me and my sister to school; it was five miles away, and we had this to walk every night and morning. The school opened on Monday morning, and me and my sister fixed up in our nicest clothes, took our dinners in a little basket and started for school. We had a little pet deer, nearly half-grown, with the spots still on it, and as we started off to school on the run, this deer followed us. We run most of the way that morning, hurrying for fear of being too late, but we got there in time—the little deer making number three. We arrived just as the teacher did, and he opened the door and told us to go in, which we did, sister taking one side of the room and I the other. The rest of the scholars soon came in, and the master rapped on the desk with his ferule and called the school to order. He was a tall, slim, ugly-looking fellow, with a long nose, freckled face, very long teeth, and jet black hair; but though he was ugly looking, we all soon learned to like him, for he was a good, clever fellow. After he called the school to order, he came to me the first one and said, "Bub, what is

your name?" I told him my name was James Gilbert Jenkins. He then said, "you are a nice little boy, I believe;" and asked me if I knew my A B C's. I told him I did; and, by his requesting me to do so, I said them all for him, and then he said, "you are a fine boy." After this he went around the room in the same manner. I remember the boy he next went to was named George Foster. When he asked him if he knew the alphabet, he answered, "No sir; I d-o-n-'t;" and the emphatic manner in which he spoke the word "don't," and the long time he dwelt on the sound, made us laugh. I went to school every day, and took much interest in it; the little deer always keeping us company. It would come into the school-house and lay down by me, and, when I went to the teacher for anything, it would go along with me, and sometimes it would rear up on its hind legs and put its fore legs on my back, and causing the whole school to laugh. The teacher did not seem to care much for this, and would only tap on the floor with his foot to stop the laughing, and let the deer remain in the room. He was a good teacher, and did not whip any of us for a month after school commenced. We were all small scholars, and he would sometimes give us as much as three hours at noon, thereby cutting short the hours of study. If any of us fell asleep, he would carefully fix us on the linn-wood benches, which were only thick planks hewed out with legs stuck in them. The master whipped me twice while I was at school, for having little fights with the boys. I loved to study, and was always at the head of my class; got my lessons well, and was there every day for three months, just as regular as the days came.

We used to run foot races quite often—the master as well as the boys; and one night after school, master and I set out to run one. I could beat all the boys running, and I could whip them all in the little boy fights, and I could throw them all wrestling, so I felt very smart, and was quite willing to run with the master. We started at the word, but the master soon stubbed his toe, fell down, and I came out ahead. I always

had the grin on him after that, and every night, after school was out, I would ask him if he wanted to run another race.

Thus three months of school passed pleasantly away, and one night, when I came home from school, I found a man talking with my father out in the door-yard a little ways from the house. As I came up, father spoke to me and said: "Jimmy, here is a man that wants you to go with him and ride his race-horses." I said to father, "I can't, for I am going to school." The stranger then spoke and said: "I will take you and give you a better schooling than you could get here." I then went on into the house; supper was soon ready, and we all took supper. This man's name was *John Forbes*. He stayed with us that night, and made an agreement with father to give me a good schooling, and at the end of such a time, (I forget the length of time,) he was to give me five hundred dollars in cash and a good horse, saddle and bridle.

WENT AWAY WITH JOHN FORBES.

The next morning, one of Forbes' horses was fixed up for me, and I started off with him, leaving my father and mother, sister, brothers and school, to go with this stranger, when I was but nine years old, to be schooled in the black and bloody art of thieves and murderers. This man Forbes, as I afterwards learned, was the head of a company of horse-racers, gamblers and highwaymen. The only other man's name that I remember as belonging to this company was Peters. We started off on a trip, and went into Breckenridge county, in the edge of Kentucky, and there we had a race for one thousand dollars; the race was run, we won it, and got the money; but we had two fights over it, and John Forbes shot one man dead on the ground. The men were arrested, had their trial, and came off clear. After this we went to Illinois and stayed about three months, and while there, we made a race for three hundred dollars; this was a sham race, which we got up on purpose to lose, in order that we might do better; the race was run, and of course we lost. In about three weeks, the race